

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VDH 06-11

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**HEART DISEASE AND STROKE TAKE HEAVY TOLL ON VIRGINIANS,
ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO HAVE DIABETES**

February is American Heart Month

(RICHMOND, Va.)—Heart disease and stroke are, respectively, the No. 1 and No. 3 killers of Virginians. They account for more than a third of all Virginia deaths. In 2004, they claimed the lives of 18,814 Virginia residents, according to the Virginia Department of Health's (VDH) Center for Health Statistics, and people with diabetes are at increased risk.

Heart disease and stroke kill 75 percent of Virginians who have diabetes, according to VDH statistics, yet two out of three people with the disease are unaware of their increased risk. Diabetes is marked by a high level of sugar in the blood. It occurs when one cannot produce or properly use insulin. High blood sugar levels damage arteries. This makes controlling diabetes a critical step in preventing heart disease and stroke.

"We urge all Virginians, especially those who have diabetes, to take care of their hearts," said Laura Wimmer, cardiovascular health project coordinator at VDH. "The best way to protect your heart, prevent stroke and reduce the risks of long-term complications of diabetes is by controlling your blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose levels."

VDH recommends that you know what your glucose (blood sugar), blood pressure and cholesterol levels are, what they should be and what you need to do to maintain normal levels. The recommended levels are:

- Blood glucose—Normal fasting blood glucose should be below 100 milligrams per deciliter (mg/dl). If you have diabetes, your hemoglobin A1c level should be less than 7 percent and checked twice a year.
- Blood pressure—Normal blood pressure should be below 120 over 80 and checked every two years. If you have high blood pressure, the goal of treatment is to reduce blood pressure to 140 over 90. If you have high blood pressure and diabetes, the goal of treatment is to reduce blood pressure to 130 over 80. If you have high blood pressure, have it checked at each doctor's visit.
- Cholesterol—Normal total cholesterol should be below 200 and checked every five years. If you have diabetes your LDL or "bad cholesterol" should be below 100.

Other factors that increase the risk of heart disease include a lifestyle without significant exercise, poor nutrition, being overweight and using tobacco. You can lower your risk of heart attack, stroke and complications from diabetes with these lifestyle changes:

- Be physically active for at least 30 minutes most days to help lower your weight and cholesterol.
- Eat less fat to reduce calories and less salt to help lower blood pressure.
- Eat more fiber from fruits, vegetables and grains and help lower your chance of heart disease
- Maintain a healthy weight to reduce stress on your heart and to help control diabetes.
- Stop smoking to decrease your heart rate and blood pressure.
- Take medicines as prescribed to receive their full benefits.

(more)

Preventing heart disease and complications from diabetes are major concerns for VDH's Office of Family Health Services. Its 50 preventive health programs touch Virginians across the span of their lifetime. Together they promote the concept that a healthy lifestyle is not a luxury, it's a lifesaver. The office's Division of Chronic Disease Prevention and Control (CDCP) funds local projects that help residents prevent and control the effects of heart disease and diabetes. The local programs develop local coalitions that conduct support groups, create wellness challenges among local businesses, increase awareness of the warning signs of heart attack and stroke and the need to call 911 immediately, promote CPR training and the placement of Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) in all work and community sites.

To learn more about managing heart disease, stroke and diabetes call the VDH CDCP toll-free at (866) 527-8654, or visit VDH's Web site at www.vdh.virginia.gov and click on Healthy Living.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

For information on VDH's local cardiovascular health projects call the managers listed below.

Alexandria—Denise Yeager, (703) 838-4400, ext. 320
Charles City and New Kent Counties—JohnJason Cecil, (804) 829-2490, ext. 125
Charlottesville—Peggy Brown Paviour, (434) 972-6232
Danville—Kathryn Plumb, (434) 799-5190, ext 145
Eastern Shore—Charlene Gholson, (757) 787-5880, ext. 249
Goochland—Chad Crouch, (804) 556-6843, ext. 6243
Hanover—Lauri Savage, (804) 365-4344
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Warsaw—Pam Lane, (804) 333-4043
Wise—Tempa Rasnick, (276) 328-1922
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For information on VDH's local diabetes projects call the managers listed below.

Eastern Shore—Faye Sandsbury, (757) 442-9653, ext. 15
Wise—Lorene Allen, (276) 328-1919

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